



# Seattle City Council

## Seattle's Yellow Pages Opt-Out System

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*(updated 5/5/10)*

#### **How can residents “opt out”?**

Seattle residents and business can now opt-out of yellow pages, or specify which ones they want to receive at <http://www.seattle.gov/stopphonebooks> or <http://seattle.catalogchoice.org>

At the website, a partnership with Berkeley, California based non-profit Catalog Choice, residents will be able to choose which yellow pages directories they wish to receive from a list of all directories delivered in Seattle. To opt-out, residents will need to create a free account with Catalog Choice by entering their home or business addresses. With one account, users will be able to opt-out of phone book deliveries to multiple addresses, for example, home, business and rental properties.

In the coming months, residents will be able to express their home delivery preferences via phone or mail as well.

#### **What if residents or businesses want to continue receiving yellow pages phone books?**

Yellow pages directories will continue to be delivered unless residents or businesses choose to opt-out. The opt-out system will also allow consumers to specify the number of directories they would like to receive from specific yellow pages companies.

#### **How will the new opt-out system be regulated by the City?**

With the passage of the city's new opt-out ordinances ([123427](#) and [123532](#)), yellow pages publishers must apply for a specific business license category to distribute directories in Seattle. The ordinances give Seattle authority to fine yellow pages publishers up to \$125 per phone book if they deliver directories to residents who opt-out at least 30 days before scheduled delivery.

Honoring the opt-out system will be required for all licensed publishers, and licenses must be renewed annually.

Residents who opt-out and still receive a phone book can file a complaint with the city through the Catalog Choice website. A threshold number of complaints will trigger an investigation. Penalties will be based upon the findings of an investigation, beginning with small fines and the possible suspension of a business license for repeated and egregious violations. The details of this penalty system are outlined in a Seattle Public Utilities Director's Rule.

#### **What are the costs associated with the opt-out system and how will it be funded?**

Yellow pages distributors must pay \$0.14 per book they deliver in the city, which will cover the cost of administering the opt-out system.

**How does this ordinance affect businesses?**

Many businesses use yellow pages directories to advertise their services. In 2009, advertisers receiving the highest number of calls from yellow pages advertising were Pawnbrokers, truck rental and leasing and auto wrecking and used parts businesses.<sup>1</sup>

Advertisers will still be able to reach residents who use yellow-pages directories to find local businesses.

**What about non-profits or smaller organizations that publish yellow pages directories?**

A license will be required for all publishers who distribute more than 4 tons of books unsolicited, door-to-door. Organizations that distribute only to their members, people who request or affirmatively accept a book, or who distribute less than 4 tons of paper per year are exempt from the regulations in the ordinance.

**What types of opt-out systems currently exist?**

The Yellow Pages Association and individual publishers offer voluntary opt-out programs. Seattle's system is the only opt-out system that provides real accountability, requiring yellow pages publishers comply with residents' delivery preferences.

**What is the percentage of phone books in Seattle's waste stream?**

Seattle's approximately 275,000 households recycle 2,231 tons of paper from phone books annually. Phone books represent approximately 3% of all recycled paper, by weight from the residential sector<sup>2</sup>.

**How does this fit into Seattle's Zero Waste Agenda?**

In 2007, the City Council unanimously adopted a zero waste strategy to increase recycling, reduce garbage and upgrade Seattle's transfer Stations. The Council set a goal that 60% of all waste in Seattle be recycled by 2012.

Other approaches to reduce products in the waste stream:

- replacing styrofoam food service ware with compostable or recyclable materials;
- extending organic food waste pick up to all single family homes in 2009, and multi-family homes in 2010;
- passing [Resolution 31169](#) in January 2010, calling for Washington to establish a Do Not Mail registry.

More on the Council's Zero Waste priorities is available [online](#).

**What about white pages?**

Washington State law (WAC 480-120-251) requires phone companies to publish and distribute residential white pages directories.

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<sup>1</sup> Yellow Pages Association Metered Ad study - "Yellow Pages Facts and Figures: Tracking Calls in the Seattle Market."

<sup>2</sup> 2005 Residential Recycling Composition Study, Chart 4. New report available in 2011.

**What is Catalog Choice?**

[Catalog Choice](#) is the winning bidder of an RFP generated by Seattle Public Utilities to administer Seattle's opt-out system. Catalog Choice is a nonprofit corporation based in Berkeley, California whose mission is to help people reduce unwanted mail, save natural resources, and protect their privacy.

Catalog Choice has years of experience in the field of stopping unwanted deliveries of direct mail and phone books. While Catalog Choice does partner with other municipalities, this is the first time Catalog Choice is working with a municipality that has regulatory and enforcement power over unwanted deliveries.

**Is there a way to also opt-out of unwanted direct mail?**

[Catalog Choice](#) offers a user-friendly portal for opting out of direct mail.

In January 2010, the Council passed [Resolution 31169](#) urging the state of Washington to create a state-wide Do Not Mail registry.

**Who can I contact if I have more questions?**

Esther Handy in Councilmember O'Brien's Office is happy to answer additional questions about this proposal: [esther.handy@seattle.gov](mailto:esther.handy@seattle.gov), 206-684-8800.